Turkiye steps up raids against IS, arrests 125

ISTANBUL: Turkiye detained another 125 persons on suspicion they belong to the militant Islamic State group, following warnings that IS planned attacks over the holidays.

Nearly 600 people have now been detained in anti-IS raids over the past week.

"We captured 125 Daesh suspects in simultaneous operations carried out in 25 provinces this morning," Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya wrote on *X*, using the Arabic acronym for IS.

On Dec 25, security forces arrested 115 IS suspects following an intelligence warning that the extremist group was "planning attacks during Christmas and New Year celebrations".

During another nationwide operation on Monday, IS militants opened fire on police in the north-western town of Yalova, killing three and wounding nine others, the interior minister said.

Six IS militants were also killed in the hours-long gun battle in the town on the shores of the Sea of Marmara, about 90 kilometres southeast of Istanbul.

A day later, another 357 suspects with ties to IS were arrested in 21 different provinces.

New Year festivities

Ahead of the New Year celebrations, the Istanbul governor's office said security had been stepped up in the country's largest city where more than 50,000 police and other officials would be on duty to ensure "a peaceful and safe start to 2026".

Extensive security measures were in place at airports, shopping malls, on public transport, and in squares and other entertainment venues where New Year celebrations were to take place.

Ahead of the festivities, Germany and Australia issued travel warnings for Turkiye, urging their nationals to exercise caution due to "the threat of terrorism".

"The period before New Year's Eve is a particularly symbolic time for terrorist attacks," Germany's foreign ministry said.

"Exercise particular caution at the turn of the year." Australia urged its nationals to "be alert to threats, especially in crowded public settings" because "there is an increased risk of terrorist attacks around large gatherings, including New Year celebrations".

Raid near Pak-Afghan border

The anti-IS raids began just days after Turkiye's intelligence agency captured a Turkish national who holds a senior IS role in a raid on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, state news agency Anadolu reported on Dec 22.

The suspect, Mehmet Goren, had allegedly been tasked with organising suicide attacks in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkiye and Europe.

The IS has staged several major attacks in Europe over the past decade, including one in Istanbul on New Year's Eve.

In the early hours of Jan 1, 2017, an IS gunman opened fire inside a nightclub on the banks of the Bosphorus, killing 39 people, mostly foreigners.

The Uzbek gunman was captured and sentenced to 40 life jail sentences.

In his comments, the interior minister warned anyone seeking to attack Turkiye, saying they would "face the might of our state and the unity of our nation".—AFP

Bulgarians ready for switch to eurozone, but wary of price hike

SOFIA: Bulgaria will become the 21st country to switch to the euro when it enters the New Year on Thursday, amid concerns the move could usher in higher prices and add to political instability rattling the Balkan country.

When midnight strikes on Wednesday, Bulgaria will give up the lev currency, which has been in use since the late 19th century.

Successive governments in the country of 6.4 million people have advocated joining the euro, hoping that it will boost the economy of the European Union's poorest member, reinforce ties to the West, and protect against Russia's influence.

But Bulgarians have been divided over the switch, with many worrying the introduction could exacerbate inflation, which hovers around 3.6 percent.

"People are afraid that prices will rise. Today it's four leva, and it will become four euros, while salaries will remain the same," a woman in her forties who declined to give her name said in Sofia.

At one of the largest and oldest markets in the capital, market stalls displayed prices of everything from groceries to New Year's Eve essentials like sparklers in both levs and euros.

"Just like the whole of Europe has managed with the euro, we'll manage too," retiree Vlad said.

"The important thing is that Bulgaria remains in Europe and distances itself from Moscow," he added.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said Bulgaria's move into the eurozone marked "an important milestone".—AFP

PUTRAJAYA (Malaysia): Fireworks light up the midnight sky over the Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque and Seri Saujana Bridge during New Year celebrations.—AFP

China warns 'separatists' against attempts for 'Taiwan independence'

Beijing completes exercises aimed at simulating blockade of the island

BEIJING: China "successfully completed" military drills around Taiwan that included live-fire exercises aimed at simulating a blockade of key ports and assaults on maritime targets, the military said on Wednesday.

Beijing launched missiles and deployed dozens of fighter jets, navy ships and coastguard vessels on Monday and Tuesday around Taiwan's main island.

"The reunification of our motherland, a trend of the times, is unstoppable," Chinese President Xi Jinping said in his New Year message from Beijing, state news agency Xinhua reported.

A spokesperson for Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) said it had "successfully completed" the drills, code-named "Justice Mission 2025".

Chinese troops would keep training to "resolutely thwart the attempts of Taiwan independence separatists and external intervention", the spokesperson said.

The Taiwanese coastguard said earlier that Chinese warships and coastguard vessels were withdrawing from surrounding waters.

Taiwan's defence ministry said in a statement it was adjusting its plans to maintain an "appropriate response mechanism".

Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te warned on Wednesday that Chinese drills targeting the island "are not an isolated incident" and pose "significant risks" to the region.

Arms for Taiwan

The drills followed a bumper round of arms sales to Taipei by Washington, Taiwan's main security backer, and comments from Japan's prime minister that the use of force against Taiwan could warrant a military response from Tokyo.

There has been a chorus of international criticism of China's drills.

Japan said the military exercises "increase tensions" across the Taiwan Strait, and that it had expressed its "concerns" to Beijing.

Australia's foreign ministry condemned the "destabilising" drills, saying it had raised concerns with its Beijing counterparts.

Beijing said criticism of its exercises was "irresponsible".

"These countries and institutions are turning a blind eye to the separatist forces in Taiwan attempting to achieve independence through military means," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a news briefing.

"Yet, they are making irresponsible criticism of China's necessary and just actions to defend its national sovereignty and territorial integrity, distorting facts and confusing right and wrong, which is utterly hypocritical." China said it had deployed destroyers, frigates, fighters and bombers "to conduct drills on subjects of identification and verification, warning and expulsion, simulated strikes, assault on maritime targets, as well as anti-air and anti-submarine operations".

A statement from its armed forces said the exercises in waters to the north and south of Taiwan "tested capabilities of sea-air coordination and integrated blockade and control".

The drills were held as US ambassador to China David Perdue met his counterparts from Australia, India and Japan, which are part of the Quad group that is seen as a counter to Beijing.

"The Quad is a force for good working to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific," Perdue said in a post on *X*, alongside a photo of the four ambassadors in Beijing.—AFP

Trump govt seizes on fraud case to target Somali immigrants

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration in recent months has latched onto news of a large-scale public benefit fraud scandal to carry out immigration raids and harsher policies targeting Minnesota's large Somali migrant community.

Federal charges have been filed against 98 people accused of embezzlement of public funds and — as Attorney General Pam Bondi stressed on Monday — 85 of the defendants are "of Somali descent."

Fifty-seven people have already been convicted in the scheme to divert $300 million in public grants intended to distribute free meals to children — but the meals never existed, prosecutors said.

Republican elected officials and federal prosecutors accuse local Democratic authorities of turning a blind eye to numerous warnings because the fraud involved Minnesota's Somali community, the largest in the country, with around 80,000 members.

"When whistleblowers raised concerns, they were told that they shouldn't say anything out of fear of being called racist or Islamophobic, or because it was going to hurt the political constituency of the governor and the ruling party, the Democrats here," state representative Kristin Robbins, a Republican who is running for governor, said.

Investigations mount

Democratic Governor Tim Walz — Kamala Harris's running mate in 2024 — rejects the accusation.

While the case became public in 2022, prosecutors ramped it up again this year with hotly politicized revelations.

Another Republican candidate for governor, state House Speaker Lisa Demuth, said the case is "finally getting the attention that it's needed."

Right-leaning YouTube content creator Nick Shirley reignited interest in the case over the holidays with a video that he claims shows daycare centers that are siphoning public money.—AFP

Will Somaliland become Israel's new ally?

JERUSALEM: Israel's recognition of the breakaway region of Somaliland last week came as a surprise to the international community.

The controversial move aligns with the country's new strategy toward its rivals, especially Iran, by granting Israelis unparalleled access to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

The move could help Israel militarily against Tehran's so-called axis of resistance in the Middle East, while making the Horn of Africa a new battleground for its rivalries, experts say.

Israel's announcement that it viewed Somaliland as an "independent and sovereign state" was a first for the self-declared republic that broke away from Somalia in 1991.

It followed discussions held "in the utmost secrecy, involving the Mossad in a para-diplomatic role", said David Khalfa, a researcher at the Jean-Jaures Foundation in Paris.

Somaliland enjoys a unique geostrategic importance, as it offers direct access to the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el Mandeb Strait, one of the world's busiest commercial shipping routes that connects the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

It is also located in close proximity to the Iran-backed Houthi fighters in Yemen, who have struck Israel repeatedly since the start of the Gaza conflict in 2023.

If granted permission to deploy on the territory of Somaliland, the Israeli military would be able to operate jets and surveillance drones to "monitor and strike the Houthis", said Khalfa.

"The possibility of operating from Somaliland territory could change the game," said Asher Lubotzky of the Institute for Israeli-African Relations in Herzliya, near Tel Aviv.

Such access would be beneficial "given that the Gulf states, the United States and Israel have all fought the Houthis in recent years without any significant results", he said.

Strait politics

Given its strategic location, Somaliland has long attracted Western interest.

Once under the influence of the Ottoman Empire, it became a British protectorate in the late 19th century, which lasted until 1960 when it joined the Somali Republic.

The United States later considered establishing a military base there in the 1980s.

In 1991, Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence from the rest of Somalia.

More than two years after the Hamas raid of Oct 7, Israel is now signalling its intention to build "counter-alliances" against Iran along the shores of a pro-Western, politically stable Somaliland.

That is "a rare asset in this part of the world", said Khalfa.

For security expert Samira Gaid of the Somali think tank Baqiis Insight in Mogadishu, Israel's recognition "reinforces concerns that the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are becoming militarised political spaces rather than neutral commercial corridors."

It also accelerates "the entanglement, over the past decade, of the Horn of Africa in Middle Eastern rivalries," she said.

Growing rivalry

Somaliland's partnership with countries from the region is not new.

The United Arab Emirates operates a military base in the region's port of Berbera under an agreement dating back to 2017, while sources claim that Abu Dhabi, an ally of Israel, may facilitate Israel's access to the facility, Khalfa said.

Last year Somaliland also entered into negotiations with landlocked Ethiopia, another Israel ally, to build a port on its coast.

Israel's recognition "seems to align well with Israel's alliances", said Colin Clarke, research director at the Soufan Center in New York.

"The Horn of Africa, like other regions of the continent, has become a battleground between so-called middle powers," Clarke added.

Analysts also point out how Israel's new alliance in the region is further fuelling the growing rivalry between Israel and Turkiye.

The two countries have been at loggerheads as they both try to expand their influence over Syria, and as Ankara aims to send troops to the Gaza Strip under the US-led International Stabilisation Force.

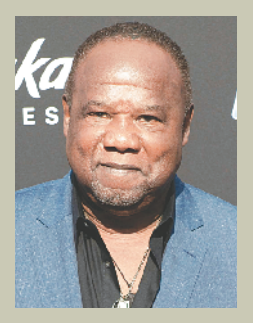
Israel has categorically rejected that possibility, highlighting Turkiye's ties with Hamas.

Turkiye has long had a foothold in Horn of Africa, and views Somalia as a quasi "satellite country", said Lubotzky.

So Israel's alliance with neighbouring Somaliland is poised to open a new front of attrition.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hit back at the diplomatic recognition on Tuesday, saying Ankara deemed it "illegitimate and unacceptable".—AFP

Isiah Whitlock, *The Wire* actor, dies at 71



A JUNE 8, 2022, file photo of actor Isiah Whitlock.—AFP

LOS ANGELES: American actor Isiah Whitlock Jr., who played a corrupt politician on HBO crime drama *The Wire* and had roles in numerous films directed by Oscar-winning Spike Lee, died at age 71 on Tuesday, his manager said.

"It is with tremendous sadness that I share the passing of my dear friend and client Isiah Whitlock Jr. If you knew him — you loved him. A brilliant actor and even better person," manager Brian Liebman wrote on social media.

Whitlock delighted audiences as slimy politician Clay Davis on the action-packed drama *The Wire*, based on former journalist David Simon's gritty tales from the seedy underbelly of drug-trafficking and criminal politicking in Baltimore, Maryland.

On Tuesday, Simon posted an image of Whitlock, smiling with gentle eyes, in honour of the actor's passing.

With more than 125 acting credits to his name, Whitlock's career spanned decades and included roles in many Spike Lee films, including *She Hate Me*, *25th Hour*, *Red Hook Summer, Chi-Raq*, *BlacKkKlansman,* and *Da 5 Bloods.*

Lee took to social media to share a photo of himself holding hands with Whitlock, calling him "My Dear Beloved Brother."

Whitlock's other memorable turns include his role as the US Secretary of Defence on the satire TV comedy series *Veep*, which parodies the workplace environment of politicians in Washington.—AFP

Bosnian Serbs to hold partial repeat vote for presidency

SARAJEVO: Bosnian Serbs will hold a partial repeat vote in February to replace their banned president, Milorad Dodik, after some results from November's election were annulled for fraud, the electoral commission said Wednesday.

The February 8 vote, concerning more than 80,000 registered voters, could prove decisive in the contest between Dodik's camp and several opposition parties in the Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska.

It will be held at 136 polling stations, out of around 2,160, Bosnia's central electoral commission said in a statement.

After the November 23 election, the commission announced a narrow victory for the candidate backed by Dodik and the ruling coalition, Sinisa Karan, who won 50.4 per cent of the vote.

His main rival, Branko Blanusa, supported by several opposition parties, garnered 48.2 per cent.

Fewer than 10,000 votes separated the two, and the opposition accused the ruling coalition of fraud. The electoral commission ordered a partial recount and eventually annulled the results in 136 polling stations.—AFP

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E-Bids are invited through **SAP-Ariba Discovery** for the service/material given below under competitive bidding procedure as per Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) rules:

SR #	TENDER NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	CLOSING DATE & TIME
1.	OGDCL-SCM-SERVICES-PNP-60-3476-308021648-2025	SERVICES FOR EXECUTION OF ANNUAL TURN AROUND (ATA - 2026) OF UCH-II PLANT, BALOCHISTAN PROVINCE	19.01.2026 AT 1030 HRS
2.	OGDCL-SCM-LD-PT-PENFD-307020258-2025	ELECTRICAL ITEMS	19.01.2026 AT 1130 HRS
3.	OGDCL-SCM-LD-PT-RM-307051525-2025	ELECTRICAL CABLES	20.01.2026 AT 1130 HRS

EXTENSION NOTICE

BID CLOSING & OPENING DATE

2. Reference our Tender Notice(s) published in newspapers on **29.11.2025, 05.12.2025** and **23.12.2025**, it is notified that the bid submission/opening dates of the following cases are extended as follows:

SR #	TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION	REVISED CLOSING DATE & TIME
1.	OGDCL-SCM-SERVICES-CB-EXPL-304769944-2025	SERVICES FOR ACQUISITION, PROCESSING AND INTERPRETATION OF GRAVITY AND MAGNETIC SURVEYS	19.01.2026 AT 1030 HRS
2.	OGDCL-SCM-FD-CB-ECMP-305162970-2025	ROTARY SCREW AIR COMPRESSORS	22.01.2026 AT 1100 HRS

3. Bidders who have already submitted/ sent their proposals (bids) may take them back and re-submit the same before the revised closing date and time mentioned above.
4. All bids will be opened 30 minutes after the bids closing date/ time.
5. Tender Notice/ detailed instructions are available on Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) website at **www.ppra.org.pk**.
6. Tender documents are available online and bids are also required to be submitted online through e-procurement portal at **https://ogdcl.com/sap-ariba-tenders** or **https://discovery.ariba.com/profile/AN01562899621**. For details see "Instruction for Bidders Section" of the tender documents.
7. OGDC reserves the right to accept or reject any bid and to annul the bidding process and reject all the bids as per Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) Rule-33.

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